



November 5, 2009

Dear Postdoctoral Researcher,

It is my pleasure to present this inaugural edition of the LLNL Postdoctoral Association (PDA) Handbook. As we formed ideas for a new manifestation of the PDA at LLNL earlier this year, we realized that newcomers to the Bay Area and LLNL could benefit from a concise, coherent source of useful information. We decided that it would be best if this information came from fellow postdocs since we have a unique perspective of the lab and the area. With an outline and a vague idea of how this process would be completed, we thus set out to write the LLNL PDA Handbook. Fortunately, it was not difficult to find people who were willing to contribute to this project. Each of the authors went above and beyond to see that this was completed within a reasonable time frame, and I am proud to have had the opportunity to work with this inspiring group of people.

This Handbook also provides a means of introducing you to the peer network within the lab. It is not uncommon for postdocs here to find themselves working within an environment where they do not encounter other postdocs. However, at this early state in our careers, the connections that we establish with peers are vital and can often lead to opportunities that would not have arisen otherwise. One of the primary purposes of the PDA is to provide opportunities for professional and social networking. We hope that you will take advantage of these opportunities and that they will enhance your experience here.

The future of the PDA and this Handbook depends upon interest from the postdoc community. My experience in working with the PDA and the Institutional Postdoc Program Board (IPPB) has been very rewarding and I would encourage you to take an active role in the postdoc community. As you use this Handbook, if there are areas where the information is lacking, please give us your feedback. This document will evolve over the years to better meet the needs of its readers. Please send feedback to me at whitley3@llnl.gov.

I wish you the best in your endeavors and look forward to interacting with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather D. Whitley".

Heather D. Whitley, PhD.

LLNL PDA Board Member and Handbook Editor, 2008-2009

LLNL Postdoc, Quantum Simulations Group, CMMD/PLS, 2007-2010



Life in the Bay Area: A Guide for New Postdocs

Editors: Heather Whitley and Ruth Tinnacher
Contributors: Sarah Baker, Ruth Kips, Kris Kulp, Sarah Nelson, Christine Zachow, LLNL Postdoc Association Board

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Welcome to the LLNL Postdoc Community

The postdoctoral program at the Lab is a critical component of the Lab's strategy for attracting world-class scientific talent essential for maintaining the intellectual capabilities required for executing the Lab's mission-based science. This program provides opportunities for postdocs to conduct world-class research in an exciting, diverse, often interdisciplinary environment. Postdoctoral fellows are selected for their scientific expertise, capability and enthusiasm for working at an institution that places a premium on scientific creativity and innovation. There are approximately 120 postdoctoral researchers at the Lab.

Institutional Postdoc Program Board

LLNL's postdoctoral program is governed by the Institutional Postdoc Program Board (IPPB), which exemplifies the Lab's commitment to sustaining a vital and robust postdoctoral program. This Board is charged with defining roles and responsibilities for the program participants, evaluating the quality and impact of the program, and providing broad-based managerial support for postdoctoral researchers at LLNL. The Board also fosters career development for postdocs of all scientific disciplines through annual poster presentations, science days, an ongoing career development seminar series and a networking group that organizes informal social activities for postdocs.

LLNL Postdoc Association "*Postdocs helping postdocs.*"

The Postdoc Association (PDA) at LLNL acts as a connection between the postdoctoral community and the IPPB. The purpose of the PDA is to help foster a community environment among LLNL postdocs, thereby providing a peer support network. All postdocs at LLNL are members of the PDA. The PDA organizes monthly lunches in the Central Cafeteria, an annual barbeque in the summer, and various social gatherings (movie nights, happy hours, bocce ball, etc.) throughout the year. The PDA also authors and edits this handbook.

For more information on the IPPB and PDA, please go to <https://postdocs.llnl.gov> or email postdoc-association@lists.llnl.gov .

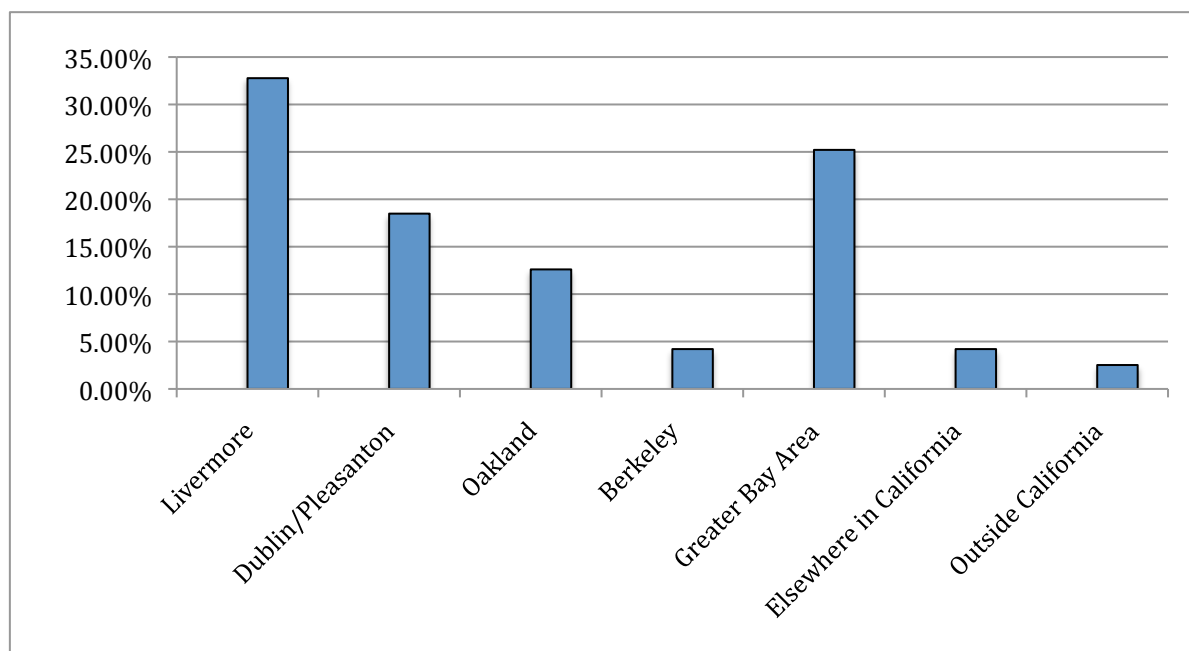
Life in the Bay Area

The Bay Area is a very diverse place consisting of many vibrant communities. According to Wikipedia:

“[The Bay Area] encompasses large cities such as San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland, along with smaller urban and rural areas. Overall, the Bay Area consists of nine counties, 101 cities, and 7,000 square miles. The nine counties are Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma.”

Whether you feel most at home in an urban environment, or prefer a more rural setting, there is a high probability that you can find exactly the type of place you’re looking for within the greater Bay Area. The purpose of this section is to provide information on various communities and resources in the area.

One question that new postdocs commonly ask is where most of LLNL postdocs live. The chart below plots the living locations of postdocs at the lab as of early 2008.



The single communities containing the highest number of LLNL occupants as of the collection of these data were Livermore, Dublin/Pleasanton, and Oakland/Berkeley. Consequently, we will focus much of our discussion here on these communities.

Living in Oakland/Berkeley

Quick overview:

Pros:

- Close to San Francisco
- Connected to the BART system
- Diverse assortment of lifestyles – from hippie to urban and everything in between

Cons:

- Longer commute times
- Some areas have higher crime

Living in Oakland and Berkeley-Sarah Nelson

I lived in Berkeley for five years while attending UC Berkeley for graduate school, which was very convenient. Berkeley is a vibrant community full of students, young professionals, and quirky folks. There are some truly unique shopping and entertainment choices there that you will likely have a hard time finding in a more suburban community like Livermore or Pleasanton. The drawback is that often times parking can be difficult (or expensive). Some of the time I did not own a car and was able to walk, bus, or BART anywhere I needed to go. Rent can be expensive, especially near the college campus, and near more popular neighborhoods such as the Elmwood, Solano, and Berkeley Hills areas.

I have lived in Oakland for the last year since becoming a lab postdoc, and have enjoyed it as well. I chose to live near highway 580 to ease my commute. On average it takes me about 40 minutes one way to drive between the lab and home, accidents notwithstanding. Oakland has a bit more of an urban flavor to it than Berkeley, with a large downtown area and some more borderline neighborhoods. Rent tends to be cheaper in most of Oakland for this reason, but don't let that scare you away! There are lovely areas to shop, dine, and go out, such as the Lakeshore, Temescal, Rockridge, and Piedmont areas. The "Uptown" area is rich with redevelopment and great draws such as the Fox and Paramount theaters, and Flora and Pican restaurants.

Both Berkeley and Oakland offer great outdoor recreation as well, with the Berkeley Marina, Tilden Regional Park, Lake Temescal, and so on. Berkeley also is very bicyclist-friendly if you choose to travel by bike to your favorite farmers market or cheese shop.

Living in Dublin/Pleasanton

Quick overview:

Pros:

- Short and relaxed commute to work
- Connected to the BART system
- Nice small-town feeling in downtown Pleasanton
- Farmer's market, nice restaurants and shops

Cons:

- This is not the city!

Living in Pleasanton-Ruth Tinnacher

I have decided to live in downtown Pleasanton, because it is close to LLNL but still connected to the BART system. On average, rent prices in Pleasanton are a little bit higher than in Livermore. Dublin is probably cheaper than Pleasanton but more expensive than Livermore. My commute to work is only 20 minutes by car (door-to-door); and since I do not have to take the highway, I have never been in a traffic jam so far. Depending on where you live and how motivated you are, biking to work and/or taking the bus may also be an option (you can take your bike on the bus as well). A shorter drive to work does not only save you money on gas and car insurance, but also gives you more spare time in the evenings.

Pleasanton is a small town, but it still has a good number of nice restaurants, an outdoor pool, a great public library and movie theatres nearby (Dublin, Livermore). Pleasanton Ridge is a close destination for a walk or short hike, and the local school district offers evening classes for art, etc. Every Saturday morning there is a great farmer's market in downtown Pleasanton (Main & W. Angela Street) with fresh produce, bread and flowers. Especially during the summer, the town organizes all kinds of events, e.g. free concerts in the park. BART is close enough to explore San Francisco and the rest of the Bay Area on weekends.

Tri-Valley Tidbits-Sarah Baker

I lived in Dublin for a year in a privately owned condo before moving to Pleasanton to an apartment complex near the BART station. While we had intended to live West of Dublin/Pleasanton to shorten my husband's commute on BART to SF, we found that it was very difficult to find apartments with the amenities that we wanted (gym, pool, central air) in the cities just to the west: Castro Valley, Hayward, and San Leandro. Both Dublin and Pleasanton have several parks and interesting non-chain restaurants. I have found that the review site www.yelp.com has been pretty reliable in finding good restaurants in the area. Dublin has a very new section on the east side, with a huge number of apartments and condos for rent. Because it is so new, east Dublin has fewer tall trees and is less established looking than much of Pleasanton. Dublin makes up for this shortcoming with beautiful expansive parks, such as Emerald Glen park, with fountains, a skate park, and sports fields. In the summer movies are played there. Dublin also has a trailhead entrance to the Iron Horse trail, which is a continuous ~30 mile bike path that I've been told extends to Walnut Creek, near the BART station. While Dublin does not seem to have a definite city center, Pleasanton has a cute Main Street that has several good restaurants as well as the farmers market. I would recommend Pleasanton to anyone considering biking to work, because it is much closer to the bike path on Stanley Blvd., which can take the ambitious biker almost all the way to the lab. Because I live near the BART station, I can take the 20x bus, which leaves from the station and arrives at the lab within 30 minutes, which is only slightly longer than the drive and much more relaxing. Pleasanton also has a pretty large mall on the West side called Stoneridge.

Living in Livermore

Quick overview:

Pros:

- Close to the lab
- Lots of open space
- Vibrant downtown
- A slew of local wineries

Cons:

- It's not the city.
- Nearest BART is in Dublin/Pleasanton

Living in Livermore- Heather Whitley

After living in Richmond and El Sobrante (towns in the East Bay area) and commuting via public transit for an hour each direction for 4 years as a grad student, a shorter commute was one thing that I was looking forward to when I graduated. When I started looking for a place to live, proximity to the lab was at the top of my list. I ended up choosing a place in Livermore. It takes me less than 10 minutes from my door to my office, and I couldn't be happier about that! However, a short commute isn't the only thing that's appealing about Livermore.

Livermore is a "middle-sized" city of 75,000+ residents. It's known not only as the home of both LLNL and Sandia National Laboratory, but also for its thriving vineyards. There is a host of vineyards around Livermore and the surrounding area, making a Saturday afternoon of wine tasting an easy outing. Livermore also has a vibrant downtown area, with diverse restaurants, including Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, Italian, Chinese, Mexican, and American food, just to name a few. The Panama Bay coffee house is a common hangout for residents of all ages and frequently features live music from local musicians. For those who love the outdoors, Del Valle Lake and Sunol Park are just a couple of the beautiful natural areas located a short drive (or a long hike) from town.

The only potential downside to living in Livermore is that it is, as we say, "not the city." Driving to San Francisco takes about an hour. If one takes BART from Dublin, it's about an hour on top of the drive to Dublin BART. If you plan to spend a lot of time in the city, it might make more sense to live closer.

As for shopping, Livermore has several major grocery stores (Safeway, Lucky, Trader Joe's) and department stores (WalMart, Target). There are several small clothing stores downtown. I often end up driving to either Dublin/Pleasanton or Tracy to go shopping at one of the malls. One thing that is lacking in Livermore, surprisingly, is a place to buy music.

Resources for finding rentals

As is true for many things nowadays, the easiest way to conduct a housing search in the Bay Area is online. A couple of the sites to check are <http://sfbay.craigslist.org> and <http://www.rent.com>. There is also a lab classifieds page where sublets and rooms/apartments

for rent from lab employees are frequently listed (<http://www.newslineads.net/index.cfm>). New sites with housing resources are coming online all the time. Check google.com when you start your search. You'll find additional websites, as well as apartment ratings. However, in order to find privately owned apartments it might be worth taking a drive through the area you are interested in to look for posted signs. Additional resources may also be found at <https://postdocs.llnl.gov/lifeAt.html>.

Bay Area Grocery & Retail

The San Francisco Bay area of California has a wealth of culinary and consumer delights. The temperate climate allows for year-round fresh fruits and vegetables, and the cosmopolitan vibe of San Francisco attracts world-class shops and purveyors of fine goods.

Here is a sampling of the area. Please refer to each shop's website for specific information:

- Grocery (Standard): Safeway, Albertson's, Trader Joe's, Whole Foods, Pak 'N Save, Lucky, Wal-Mart, Target (limited), Grocery Outlet, 99 Cent Only Store
- Alameda County Farmer's Markets:
<http://www.pcfma.com/marketsc.php?cnty=Alameda%20County>
- Grocery (Specialty/Organic):
 - ***Berkeley Bowl: The best and greatest variety of produce, hands-down. Many organic options, large bulk food section.
 - ***Cheeseboard Collective: The Berkeley Cheeseboard shop sells arguably the largest variety of cheeses in Northern California, and possibly the entire state (country?). In addition to cheese, they sell fresh baked bread and pastries, and operate a pizza shop next door. Arizmendi in Oakland and Emeryville offer pizza, bread, and pastries but no cheese shop.
- Everyday Needs (e.g. paper towels, soap): Target, Wal-Mart, Kmart, Walgreens, Longs Drugs, CVS (formerly Rite-Aid)
- Housewares (e.g. cutting board, towels): Bed Bath and Beyond, Target, Wal-Mart, Kmart, IKEA
- Pharmacies: Walgreens, Longs Drugs, Rite-Aid, Target (some), Safeway (some), Wal-Mart
- Clothing: Target, Wal-Mart, Kmart, JCPenney, Sears, Macy's, Nordstrom, and many more. Check local malls for more stores (Bay Street, Stoneridge, etc.)
 - ***Jeremy's: The Berkeley location has catalog returns, overstock, and floor models from J. Crew and Anthropologie, as well as as-is/damaged items from major designers (Armani, Lucky Brand, Dolce & Gabbana, etc.) Mens, womens, shoes, accessories, and home store. <http://www.jeremys.com/>
 - The Great Mall in Milpitas (near San Jose) is a great outlet mall, where you can find brand name items at low prices:
<http://www.simon.com/mall/default.aspx?ID=1250>
- Auto Parts: Kragen, Napa, Target, Wal-Mart, Kmart, AutoZone
- Hardware: Orchard Supply Hardware, Home Depot, Ace Hardware
- Furniture: IKEA, Target, Wal-Mart, Pier 1 Imports, Ethan Allen
- Electronics: Best Buy, Target, Wal-Mart, Radio Shack, Magnolia

- Books: Barnes & Noble, Borders, Target, Wal-Mart
- Used/Rare Books: Pegasus & Pendragon, Spectator Books, Another Change of Hobbit, Comic Relief, Moe's, Half Price Books
- Music/Movies: Best Buy, Borders, Target, Wal-Mart
- Used CDs/DVDs: Amoeba, Rasputin, Half Price Books
- Pet Supplies: Pet Food Express, Petco, PetSmart, Lucky Goldfish, Target, Wal-Mart, grocery stores
- Sporting Goods: REI, Wilderness Exchange, Big 5, Fleet Feet Sports, Sports Authority, Target, Wal-Mart, Berkeley Sports, Sports Chalet

Utilities

Electricity and gas are provided by PG&E in all communities in the Bay Area, <http://www.pge.com/>. Water services in the East Bay are provided by East Bay Municipal Utility District, www.ebmud.com.

There are a variety of phone, cable, and internet companies from which you may purchase these services. Check online to find out which companies offer services in your area. The most commonly used companies are probably Comcast and AT&T (www.comcast.com).

Bay Area Transportation

Vehicle registration and driver's license

You must get a California driver's license or ID card within 10 days and register your vehicle within 20 days of entering California in order to avoid fines. More information can be found at <http://www.dmv.ca.gov/newtoca/newtoca.htm>.

To get your license, you first need to take the written test, and then you can schedule an appointment for the behind the wheel test. If you are a foreign national, you typically have to wait until you obtain your social security number before being able to apply for a driver's license.

Check the DMV website for your nearest DMV location. You can go there to pick up a free booklet that you need to read carefully to pass the written test, or you can download this information from the web (www.dmv.ca.gov). When you apply for a California driver's license/ID card, you must present an acceptable birth date/legal presence document, e.g. passport, and provide your social security number. The DMV website says you should schedule an appointment for the written, vision and behind-the-wheel driving test. The written test consists of a number of multiple choice questions. For the test on the road, a DMV person sits next to you in your car and evaluates your driving. You are also required to do a few maneuvers, like backing up along a curb. Nothing too difficult, though. It doesn't matter what car you use for this part, so you can do it with your rental, in case you don't have a car of your own yet.

Travel, commuting, and public transit

Depending on where you start from, getting to the lab and around the Bay Area can be a breeze or an exercise in frustration. Here is some information to hopefully make your trip speedy, affordable, and environmentally friendly.

Planes:

There are three major airports in the Bay Area: San Francisco (SFO), Oakland (OAK), and San Jose (SJC). Public transit in the form of rail and buses serve each and can help you save on parking. For specific information on each airport please visit their websites.

Trains:

Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) is a fast alternative to driving through the Bay Area. BART serves areas including San Francisco, Dublin/Pleasanton, Richmond, Fremont, Daly City, and many points in between. The trains run from early in the morning to midnight (check schedules on bart.gov for specific information and fares) seven days a week. Many stations offer affordable or free parking. Some offer long-term parking, check individual stations for details. All trains traveling underground have cellular phone service through major providers. BART can be used to go to many points of interest in the area, including the Embarcadero, Union Square, San Francisco Civic Center, Oakland Coliseum, and more. If you are taking BART to/from San Francisco in combination with MUNI bus service, make sure to get your discounted rider ticket at the BART station before going through the orange ticket gate. CalTrain is another heavy-rail system similar to BART that serves the peninsula and South Bay areas. Connections to/from BART can be made at the Millbrae station. See caltrain.com. Amtrak service also exists in the Bay Area, with stations throughout. BART to Amtrak connections may be made at the Richmond and Coliseum stations, check the Amtrak schedule for details and routes.

The Altamont Commuter Express (ACE) train has a stop on Vasco Road for those who wish to commute to the lab from east of the Altamont Pass. For more information please see acerail.com.

Automobiles (and Buses):

For convenient payment of toll fares on the numerous Bay Area bridges, the “FasTrak” is available. It is a small square transponder that logs in crossings at the toll booth, and withdraws the fare from the holder’s pre-paid account. FasTrak units are available at Safeway and many other retail stores. Check bayareafastrak.org for more details.

Each area of the Bay has their own bus service. The names are AC Transit (Berkeley/Oakland/Emeryville etc. including some Transbay service), Muni (San Francisco), SamTrans (San Mateo County) and Wheels (Dublin/Pleasanton/Livermore). Wheels has bus stations at the Dublin/Pleasanton Bart station and the lab entrance. Many services offer frequent rider tickets, some have “night-owl” service from San Francisco (AC Transit). Check each agency’s website or pamphlet for their routes and schedules. For a trip plan, see 511.org for a trip planning utility that makes use of all major public transit in the Bay Area!

The 511.org site also has a link for ridesharing and carpooling. Many lab employees live outside the Livermore area, so carpooling is a popular option. The 511.org site allows you to

view available carpools in your area based on destination, and provides contact information. There are also ways to set up new car/vanpools via the site.

The Alameda County Guaranteed Ride Home program (<http://www.grh.accma.ca.gov>) allows anyone commuting via bus, train, van/carpool, bike, ferry, or foot to know they have a safe and reliable ride home in the event of a sudden change of plans such as: illness, working unscheduled overtime, ridesharing vehicle breakdown, etc. This allows commuters to spare the air and leave their car at home with peace of mind.

Social Security Cards for non-citizens

If you are coming to the US for the first time, you will need to obtain a Social Security Card. Information on this process can be found at: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10096.html> It's recommended to wait 10 days after arrival in the US before applying for a Social Security Number (SSN). The SSN is what you could call a tax registration number. You may be asked for your SSN when setting up a bank account etc., but be careful about sharing your number, and **don't carry your SSN card with you.**